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ABSTRACT

The findings of a survey conducted to gather information about the state of film study at two-year colleges in the United States are reported in this paper. The responses of 51 schools are reported in the following areas: (1) curriculum areas represented by the respondent; (2) titles of courses; (3) institutional enrollment; (4) class enrollment, rental costs of films, and numbers of films screened; (5) course tenure; (6) rationale for inclusion of film courses in the curriculum; and (7) extent of cross-discipline teaching. The reported findings suggest that film study courses are an integral part of the two-year college curriculum. The paper then discusses the expanding interest in film study courses across the nation, sets forth a rationale for incorporating films into speech communication programs, and delineates some practical problems that must be faced in developing such courses. (FL)

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CINEMA AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Kent R. Brown

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After spending many years in frustrating negotiations with academic deans and curriculum committees, film study courses are now enjoying a substantial degree of scholastic respectability. In 1974-1975, according to figures supplied by the American Film Institute, 791 institutions of higher learning offered 3,873 film courses, including 2,962 undergraduate courses.

While the Institute's survey embraced more than 3,000 post-secondary institutions, out of which 1,055 responded, it is interesting to note that activity at the community college level aggressively reflects the national trend toward comprehensive film education. In order to gather information about the state of film study at junior, community, and area colleges throughout the country, I sent ninety seven (97) questionairres to institutions listed in the American Film Institute's Guide to College Courses in Film and Television (1975). Fifty one (51) individuals responded from seventeen states, with California (12), New York (5), Florida (5) and Michigan (4) representing half the responses. Six (6) individuals stated that film courses were not taught at their institutions. The results of the questionairre are synopsized below. (Some questions were left unanswered, thereby creating variances within subtotals.)

Curriculum Areas Represented

English (11)
Speech-Theatre-Communications (9)
Humanities (6)
Art (3)
Others: Photography, Visual Studies, Visual Arts, Instructional Media, Multi-Media, etc.

Titles of Courses

Motion Picture Production, Film Appreciation, Survey of American Film, Introduction to Cinematography, Landmarks of the Cinema, Advanced Film Metholds, Art of the Film, Film and Literature, International Film Masterpieces, Themes in Film, Women and Minorities in Film, Documentary Film, among others

Institutional Enrollement

Twenty eight (28) of the institutions enroll under 5000 students, while sixteen (16) enroll over 5000 students. The majority of responses cited daytime enrollment, with only five responses mentioning evening enrollment

Class Enrollment-Rental Costs-Numbers of Films Screened

Several institutions sponsor many courses each year, while others offer a single course each semester-quarter. The figures below represent the average number (students, dollars, films) for each course per semester-quarter, regardless of the number of courses offered in any one semester-quarter.

Under 5000 Enrollment		Over 5000 Enrollment	
Students	15-25 (8)	Students	15-25 (5)
	25-35 (2)		25-35 (0)
	35-50 (4)		35-50 (4)
	50-75 (5)		50-75 (0)
	75 + (7)		75 + (7)
Films	6-8 (2)	Films	6-8 (5)
	9-12 (6)		9-12 (2)
	13-15 (12)		13-15 (5)
	16 + (5)		16 + (5)
Cost	Under-150 (2)	Cost	Under-150 (3)
	150-200 (3)		150-200 (1)
	200-275 (3)		200-275 (1)
	275-400 (3)		275-400 (2)
	400 + (15)		400 + (9)

Funding

Thirty eight (38) of the institutions completely fund their film courses, while six (6) supplement institutional funding with student lab fees. Three institutions receive financial assistance from departmental allocations, grants, and private donations

Course Tenure

The questionairre revealed that film courses are recent additions to the community college curriculum

1-2 years (2)
3-4 years (15)
5-8 years (21)
9 + years (6)

Rationale For Inclusion of Film Courses

(16) Professional training for film/TV industry
(24) Student demand for film study courses
(31) The need to acknowledge film as an area of the Humanities
(14) The need to offer relevant courses to generate higher enrollment

Several respondents specified more than one rationale and also supplied additional strategies: faculty interest, the film medium as an art form, opportunities for students to produce documentaries for community agencies, support for existing audio-visual technology programs, etc.

Team Teaching

Only two responses indicated that courses were team taught by faculty members from different disciplines, such as Art and English

While the survey cannot speak for those individuals who did not respond to the questionairre, the results strongly suggest that film study courses have become an integral part of the community college curriculum. Since nearly half the institutions, regardless of enrollment, allocate $400 or more per course (with some exceeding $1,500) an institution's enrollment appears to have no bearing on the size of rental budgets. Additionally, since thirty eight (38) institutions completely fund these classes, modest class enrollment (between 15-35 students) does not seem to impede the creation or continuation of film courses. Unfortunately, in light of these accomplishments, team teaching does not fare as well. The courses are quickly becoming compartmentalized within specific territorial boundaries. More steps need to be taken to integrate areas of expertise in order to provide a multifaceted learning experience.

The demand for such courses is easily explained. The present college generation, as the media mongers continually reiterate, has been weaned on a complex mixture of media experiences. Moving images are now an indispensable part of its informational and aesthetic fabric. A vast amount of the information high school students receive about past and contemporary history in general, and about current lifestyles, behavior patterns and interpersonal relationships in specific, is screened upon the retina of their subconsciousness while watching television or interacting at the drive-in movie.

Our students, indeed all of us, live in an age which competes imagistically for our votes, our love, our money, and our minds. And if the growth rate in instructional media, television and film stimuli has been impressive up to this date, the onslaught of moving images will take a quantum leap forward in the immediate future when one considers that the potentials of cassettes, video tape and discs have barely been unearthed. As teachers we must ask ourselves how we can assist our students in deciphering and decoding these myriad communication systems. They must learn not only why they are affected rhetorically and aesthetically by the film experience, but they must also learn how to develop evaluative criteria, standards whereby they can become discriminating consumers of communication products.

The attraction of film in an academic setting can be found in the diverse tasks which it can perform. English students can investigate the characteristics of the visual media by comparing them to prose structures in courses entitled "The Novel Into Film." Here the intrinsic dimensions of each medium, with regard to organization, point of view and symbolic communication, are discovered and discussed. Students of contemporary American thought can examine the role played by American Film in the formulation, modification and dissemenation of the American image. And sociology students interested in national norms and pattern systems---the family unit and subculture lifestyles, crime and the urbanized society---can gain valuable insights into the pressures exerted upon modern man in conflict with himself and his milieu. As stimulating as they explorations are, however, these areas of study are not the private domaines of the English, history or sociology teacher. They are the provinces of the educator. Film study can create a distinctive bridge between diverse disciplines, a bridge which can open up fertile possibilities for combining the training of the psychologist with that of the historian and the communication theorist.

I am not suggesting that while our colleagues in other fields have been incorporating film study into their classroom environment that we in Speech Communication have been concerned only with devising new topics for demonstration speeches. The survey belies such an interpretation. I am proposing, however, that if we have been interested in supplementing traditional studies with explorations into film, then we will find that college administrations are more benign now than ever before, that precedents for such directions clearly exist, and that college students are highly responsive to analyzing the media. Additionally, by using integrated team teaching methods, the student comes to understand that the field of Speech Communication embraces more than speech outlines and symposium discussions. The student will discover that we are committed to preparing him to cope with emotional, economic and political confusion by assisting him to marshall his powers of analysis, reason and clear headed decision making.

As an example of how film study can enrich our Speech Communication offerings, let me cite a few documentary films which conveniently lend themselves to rhetorical analysis. The Plow That Broke the Plains (1936) and The River (1937), both directed by Pare Lorentz could be screened in persuasion and communication theory classes. In light of the government's need to alter national farming and conservation habits, these films could be analyzed for their rhetorical strategies and for their selection of evidence. Students could also profit from seeing some of the many brilliant propaganda films generated during the Second World War period. Triumph of the Will, for example, the classic film made by Leni Riefenstahl which creatively documents the Nazi party's 1934 Nuremberg rally, presents Hitler as a God of infinite power, and depicts German youth as robot-like warriors committed to world domination.

In America, to shore up our national morale, Frank Capra made Prelude to War (1943), Battle of Russia (1944) and other propaganda films under the series title of Why We Fight. Designed to inform the fighting man about the state of world affairs and why he found himself in uniform, the series deftly incorporates German, Russian and Japanese war footage, Disney animation, and dramatized Hollywood scenes into a visual and aural plea to defend the world against the Axis powers. And for Britain, beseiged for what must have seemed to be an eternity, films such as London Can Take It (1940) and Listen to Briatin (1942) were created to reaffirm for the populace their faith in the durability of solid British stock.

In addition to motion picture documentaries, numerous television documentaries can also provide excellent learning experiences. Harvest of Shame (1960), a look at the maltreatment of migratory workers, The Battle of Newburgh (1962), an investigation into welfare problems in Newburgh, New Jersey, and A Time For Burning (1966), a searing portrait of a minister's attempt to integrate his white congregation, all document interpersonal relationships and the commensurate communication problems which emerge from intensive human interaction.

Although I have mentioned only documentary films, fiction films may be used most fruitfully, expecially those dealing with social adjustment problems.

At this point, having discussed the expanding interest in film study courses across the country, and having set forth a brief rational for incorporating films into Speech Communication programs, let me mention some of the practical problems you might encounter in developing such a course.

Assuming your administration acknowledges the need for film study, or at least the need for renting a large number of films for an existing course, you may still face the issue of adequate funding. The most inexpensive course to fund, as I've intimated above, is one which focues on the documentary film. A superb offering of films, between 15-20, will cost no more than $250-$300 at the most. In fact, with careful planning, the course might well cost under $200.00. A course using a large number of fiction films will, expectedly, be more expensive. The key lies in a judicious selection of films. I've included at the end of this paper a list of major distributors who will be more than happy to furnish you with their catalogues. Take time to read them from cover to cover. You'll find that the same feature film, or documentary, might vary in price as much as $25-$60.

If complete funding is not available, the lab fee can be instituted. Such a fee might run as high as $10, if you felt high rental fiction films were necessary, and could alleviate much of the institution's direct financial responsibility. Most likely, on a first venture, the administration will be inclined to share the cost with lab fees. Team teaching could also relieve financial strain by having both departments share the expense. If, just to think of all contingencies, no monies were forthcoming, local organizations, public libraries, area and local arts councils, church groups and other organizations could be approached as sponsors. In this situation the films

could carry a common theme pertinent to your specific community, and the class could be scheduled at a time to accommodate the sponsor. Student activity associations can also be most helpful if they are willing to select films to supplement the purpose of your course. School libraries are becoming increasingly interested in enlarging their media holdings and might well purchase several films which could be used in many disciplines. Such a film library, in time, would deemphasize the need for continual film rentals. A list of organizations which sell quality prints is also included at the end of this paper. Prices fluctuate here as well, so diligence is required to seek out the best return for your investment.

Once funding differences have been reconciled, the next step is to organize the class and begin considering how the course will be taught. Schedule the class at the most optimum time in order to appeal to as many students as possible. Many feature film courses are taught in one three hour block late in the afternoon or at night. Here the teacher can choose to lecture at the beginning of the class, and then close out the period by screening the film. After the lecture and the film, however, little time remains for discussion. It might be best to provide only a brief introduction, see the film, and then discuss it with the class, leaving handouts and text assignments to supplement the viewing experience. Some institutions schedule a separate discussion period in addition to the master class. This period is frequently used for lectures, further class discussion, and testing. Again, with team teaching, different teachers could lead separate discussions, reserving the master class for pooling their observations. A popular option to the three hour block is to schedule the course two days a week for two hours each session. Documentaries usually run an hour and fit more comfortably into the traditional 50-60 minute period. Order the films at least three months in advance, and have alternate films in mind in case your first choices are unavailable. Whatever decision is made, let me urge you to definitely keep time available for group discussion. A locked-in lecture format stiffles discussion and will undermine the major reason for screening the films.

If all has gone well up to this point, the course has survived a complex maze of administrative, budgetary and scheduling stumbling blocks. The last problem to be overcome is how to communicate the content of the course to the students. One word of caution. It is too often presumed that the films will teach themselves, an unfortunate attitude consistent with the perverse

notion that an anthology of plays adequately teaches a course in dramatic literature. The films I've mentioned, and dozens like them, as well as the best fiction films available, can serve your needs as exciting discussion springboards, as visual illustrations of communication models and behavior patterns, and as indexes to the accomplishments, frustrations and hopes of man. But the final and most lasting guiding force in the classroom is the teacher. Films, tapes, records, cassettes, slides and other teaching aids are just what they are called. Aids. Not substitutes for the teacher whose rich and varied personal and professional experiences contribute most lastingly to the learning environment. For it is our responsibility to shape the material and human resources available to us. There is much to learn, and question, and ponder. Good luck.